lives in transition

featuring:
Akeel Adil
Ammayeh Benton
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We are inside and outside and a part of and apart from, all at once. Why, here we are. Why are we here? When you are somewhere, when you are present, it is as if you've left time behind, when it normally feels as though time has left us behind. It is all so relative, and I've spent so much time writing about time. Like how every moment expands or contracts according to our wishes, and plans that have already been made, many outside of our control. A moment can be a split second or it can feel like it will never end. A lifetime is made up of moments and a moment is made up of lifetimes. Because lives are constantly colliding, overlapping, moving along and connecting at certain intervals. We mimic the city, maybe—moving, churning, yearning, seeping with light, orchestrating motion. The city being any place, any place at all, not just the one we're in.

We all walk with different feet. We see with different eyes. Yet we have all arrived here, and here we are now. We find ourselves beneath a world of uncertainty, navigating, as if through a maze. We try to alleviate the hatred that breeds in the stagnant pools of mistrust, refuse to let it overpower the softness of love. We try to mend all that is broken.

We expect grace, we expect kindness. We have reasons for giving, and for getting. We notice the invisible fences, the eyes in the sky. We see through false flags and false notions of freedom. We cross borders to lands unknown. Folding into the lives of one another, we treasure the interconnectedness of it all.

We fill these light blue lines with words we know from this language we've been handed and learned to use. The language has faults, its history rife with ill-employed notions. But we can use it to our advantage. We can use it to convey our thoughts and emotions. And arrange things that we might not have otherwise arranged, had we not stepped up to meet the challenge of filling an empty page. Through writing exercises, we exercise our right—our right to write.

Where were we? In the fire in the belly? In the eye of the storm? In a grain of sand? Could our world fit?
The black space
is the only place
that I can have a voice

Pen to paper
let it flow

I have no choice
I repeat myself
I repeat myself

Hoping they hear me the first time a third or fourth time
So I bleed here I echo here I rhyme
I transition into richer tones
So someone’s story could be told
With a voice of similarity
Or that doesn’t use the vulgarity
of the ivy league to understand me

Why my helix is caged,
My DNA left mutated,
forever changed
The Feel of it All

I feel everything,

Snailing, life millimeters by,

Dragging to what may be the inevitable.

Skin scrapes.

Concrete.

Fissuring . . . fire released.

Fists balled,

Pull-up,

Push-up,

Squat . . . moisturize.

Four hours in, I arise,

Meeting with a bus, ferry, train ride.

Two hours worked, eyes bloodshot,

Better health in a cell block.

Strands of silver in my hair.

I feel everything, my body is no longer the same.

Eyes smile, a crow is resting by their sides.

A need to shave, socks are dirty, laundry day,

Off the bus, the man lays, investigate,

Watch the yellow tape.

Is there beauty in the projects . . .

Can't tell by its homogenized face.

I feel everything, but this is just another day.
Why Is That So

I’m here in a place that shelters me from the elements of nature,
And I still feel the coldness of the world.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place that is supposed to provide me with safety,
But I do not feel safe at all.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place that gives me food for nourishment,
Yet I still feel weak.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place which clothes me, so that I’m not naked,
And strangely I feel shamefully naked.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place around so many people,
Still I am all alone.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place where it seems I have so much,
Yet I feel as if I have nothing.
Why is that so?

I’m here in a place where I think of you, then I feel safe,
Strong, and I have no shame. I feel so much warm comfort,
And as if I have everything.
Why is that so?
As I Walk

As I walk through the valley of The Shadow of death, I shall fear no evil.
Heroin addicts that don't fear those needles.
Thieves and murderers that don't fear or regard any legals.
Are we sane people?
What the system does is blame people.
Stripping one's humanity—they say they can change people.
Stripped of our names, we are all one and the same, my people.
There is fear in knowing truth and a thin line between good and evil.
Dosh was

Born atop a mountain
the sacred place where Abraham went to slay his son

colored olive sandstorm eyed
hair of Jesus’ night sky

the spitting image of man made God obviously beautiful
wrapped in Zion’s lace

Shielded from the world in his invisible alabaster box
He prophesied with Mohammed
detached with Buddha

I Was in awe of him

Biblically addicting scented sandalwood This was just a veil

Like all veils it was lifted and he fell beneath
his ethereal
layers
thrummed a suffocating darkness

He would rather feed dogs than nourish those around him
He took pleasure in the sight of an emaciated soul
He laughed at the stained glass hearts of others
He only respected the dog for it chains itself to that which feeds it
Hi, my name is Anam and I am a 26 year-old Pakistani American woman. Even though I am physically here, I am invisible in this house. I am an accountant and far from a burden to my father, whose house I still live in. I pay for the groceries, I pay for my own phone, and to top it off, I have been paying for every single car I’ve owned. Well, not everyone in this house pays for their own luxuries. This is just one of the many webs of my life.

Now to my “loving” family… First, my mother. She is a breast cancer survivor and also my best friend. She has gone through her own agonies in life and it seems like no one but me hears her pain and happiness. People in this house don’t listen much. When my mom is not at work, she is stuck with my aunt, but my aunt she is crazy and very anti- me and anti- my mom. If I start telling you about her it would just drive you nuts, just remember: crazy aunt.

Now the only person my aunt does like and worships is my brother. How he manages to charm my aunt is beyond me! He doesn’t do anything for her—I mean not an effing thing. For some freaking reason he is always right. I guess that’s a cultural thing. The man is always right, or at least in this house. He can go anywhere at any time and no one bats an eyelash. I leave, it's like world war 10. I do things for my aunt, buy her things because no one wants to spend money or time with her, yet I’m always wrong. Ooh yeah, he is becoming a doctor so everyone (my dad and aunt) thinks he is better than me. My miserable dad says to my cousin Sarah who is a doctor, “Don’t live a simple life.” This message is well directed towards me, as I am not a doctor but an accountant like him. He makes me feel like shit. Why do some people feel good about themselves by making other feel bad?

Whenever my dad senses that I am in a good mood, he knows how to ruin it. Earlier today, for example, I finished all my work at my job and was happy because it was sitting there for weeks. I get home, tired and drained, and I just passed out on the couch. When I awake for dinner, my dad actually asks me “Why did you take a nap?” I was so heated. Like, how stupid of a question is that. I simply say, “oh because I sit on my butt all day so I don’t know dad, I’ll ask you next time before I nap.” He then gets pissed at me for responding. Yes, I know—what a loving family.

I always put family first, now I’m going to be first. I decided I would become more hardworking and more in tune with myself. I exercise my mind to emit energy that could engulf another person’s body and mind. Ahh, I saw a difference in my family because they didn’t see how I was making them happy for once, even if it was me doing it. It seemed to happen over night. I asked Allah in the last prayer of the
night, Isha, to allow me to bring happiness to other people through me. And there I was tapping into
other people's minds and allowing their negative thoughts to be happy ones. I just can't believe it
happened overnight.

When I came into contact with people, I could tell by their aura how they were feeling. One
person I could not quite get was him. The love of my life. It been couple years now since I gained
through blessing these uncanny abilities. Every time I was with him, I could not read what he wanted
me to. For some reason I felt him so ever-present in my mind at all times, but I couldn't get in his. The
million dollar question now was: was he also blessed with these abilities, and how long did he have them?

One day we were hanging out and about to watch a movie, “Finding Nemo.” He was unnaturally
quiet, but nice to me in the way he is always. I pushed into his mind, an inch at a time. I guess he
allowed me to, because all of a sudden I felt a door slam in my face—actually my mind. He was allowing
me to enter, but when I was at the threshold he slammed me out. This is where my whole world hung. I
would soon enough learn: the love of my life had a deep, dark secret that would change both our lives and
worlds!
Loveless Love Affair

You have a King who has a Queen who he loves endlessly. He is a King who is quite devoted to his children without doubt; whole-heartedly.

His Queen is true and loyal to him, yet she says that she doesn’t love him by her own declarations. Yet everything she does shows that she loves only him.

She has ruled in his absence, their kingdom has flourished. The children have excelled to their greatest potential. Yet none of what she has done is out of love for him.

Her claim is she is a Queen without a King; she has yet to choose her King.
There was a time I thought I was the luckiest boy in the world when I saw my sister come in the house with a White Castle bag. She would hold the bag in front of me out of my arm's reach, teasingly. I could already taste the warm burgers and greasy fries that I would later drown in ketchup, but she would not hand the bag over until our deal was brokered—could she sneak her boyfriend in the house? I loved it when she babysat me because she was the rebellion that rewarded the white lies I told my mother about the boys she wasn't sneaking into the house. She would always introduce me to them as her adopted brother because I was, but I guess she felt the need to honestly explain the reason why I was a few shades too dark to be apparently related. Our parents raised us to respect the house and all the rules that came with it, and on that summer day when my mother came home from work, she asked me if my sister had any friends over—I felt compelled to answer honestly: I told her no. I was conscribed to my sister's world of tattoos and leather vest secrets. Home is what you make it, and for me, it has always revolved around the opening and closing of a door.

Sometimes I question where I got my spunk from, then my thoughts wander to the slamming of a door. In my house, slamming a door was a great way to end a sentence or even a better way to segue an admonishment into an ass whipping. But regardless of its ramifications, I believed I've not only adopted my sister's method of segueing, I've mastered it ineffably. I could remember her arguing with my mother about one thing or another, but all I could hear was Godzilla thrashing the living room—the fireplace's mantle cleared of family photos. I looked around the living room finding my favorite picture of her and saw that the glass in the picture frame had cracked—she had left without kissing me goodbye. Her walking away from the home and family that loved her would become cyclical. There were no doors slamming that day.

Lying in my bed one night, I questioned why my sister couldn't be like the sisters on T.V. Why couldn't I go to her house in the suburbs when I needed to get away, but I ended up knocking on a project door to play with kids who didn't know mommy? But why was it that I felt that this was the safest place in the world when shootouts were far from a sporadic occurrence here? I still wonder about those kids that I used to help with their homework, let them beat me in
wrestling matches, admonish when they would come out of their rooms before the weed smoke cleared up, or would smack their hands when they grabbed the joint out of their father’s ashtray. I always wondered why my sister wasn’t doing the right thing when she knew better . . . was taught better. I was young then, and even though I wanted to make a change, I wasn’t physically able to exert my will over their father, and once I stepped out of those project doors, that world was behind me, but also in front of me.

Then there was the day that my sister’s endless cycle culminated into me pushing her wheel chair out of Orlando International Airport. I could remember exactly what she was wearing as my uncle wheeled her out of the terminal—no more than eighty pounds. Ambivalence raged within me—weighing my heart—when I saw her. She looked like the crypt keeper from *The Tales from the Crypt*, but her eyes still twinkled our secret conscription. She smiled then cried, and I couldn’t resist hugging her skeletal frame and kissing her balding head—I was still her JoJo. The streets were tearing her apart while H.I.V decimated her immune system. Months later, when she regained her health, it was like her world of tattoos and leather vest was beckoning and she walked out of the house door—I was no longer conscripted. But months later, I closed the same door behind me.

It’s like I’ve followed in her footsteps because I found myself walking through my friend’s project door. I was living with her kids, and their hearts were colorblind to our racial differences (love has that effect), but all I could see was my niece and nephews in their black faces. I always kept an appraising eye on the youngest one because he was asthmatic, and his lungs were under constant assault from the Newport in between his mother’s lips. But I believe it was the crack that she rolled then frizzled that was truly taking its toll on him. No matter how much perfume she sprayed, the scent of jasmine could never mask the monster that embedded itself in the apartment. I remember my heart being rented when he asked me if I was coming back, when he saw me leaving with my suitcase—I was compelled to answer as honestly as I did my mother: yes, I told him.

One night, I remember thinking about a conversation we had—me and my sister. I couldn’t say it clearer than I love you when I spoke to her on the phone in a prison booth. She
had walked through our house doors once again, her fiancée in tow. She asked me why I couldn't come home now, but all I could say as a reply was: two more years. I guess she never grasped the concept of a prison sentence, or how violent offenders aren't given anything except time although most violent crimes could be linked to drugs in a neighborhood. My sister’s body was frittering away through drug use, and I was involved in an altercation with men who wouldn't have been on the streets, myself included, if it wasn't for drugs. But I guess the system needs to rotate its doors in a way that what is apparent, isn't a nexus, only a drug dealer wheeling a Lexus or a fiend itching for the next fix. My sister never had it all, her mind, daffy since birth, would never understand the concepts of Time and Prison. I'll wait for you to come home to get married, she told me. I want you to walk me down the aisle—not daddy. The church doors were waiting for me.

On the same night, I thought about another conversation we had. I wish I never raised my voice at her while she lay in a hospital bed, or dangled the idea of the prospect of returning home in front of her like she dangled the White Castle bag in front of me. I needed her to conscribe to my cause—her health and my hope—but all she wanted to do was to come home. I still feel that way now as tears come down my cheeks because I never got the chance to tell her that I was sorry before her last breath. Or the tears that I never shed at her funeral because I felt dehumanized by the officers—I shed them now. But when I talked to my mother about our conversation, all she could relate was that my sister felt alive because she talked to me. I could still feel all her kisses and caresses, and remember how I used to wipe my face after, or how I squirmed and ran from her when all she wanted to do was give me love. I wish I could hide behind a bottle, but there is no filter between myself and my memories. Then I wonder, why did it take me over a year to come to this point, or is it that my pain has led me to pen this story? And now I remember my mission, and the reason why I will not be going back to a suburb in Orlando when my time is up. I have to walk through those project doors to remind those kids that their mother still lives through the opening and closing of a door . . .
*Double Consciousness*

The self is a yearling but they say it's an elk

Eggy judgments
sopped up with schadenfreude toast

Commandeer the eye
Choke lotus for enlightenment

Peel skull fruit sideways for one green thought
Curiosity is opium when inhaled completely

No longer pickled apricot
waiting to be plopped into mouths of gardenia

Refuse to be xeroxed and abandoned Be a beautiful boundless peanut
magnetically shelled from the snarky soup Carver himself splintered

Tenderly vanish into red
Caution is for yarrows not the lily
(Shunned by his neighbors and kin, and ill man sits alone in the light of the sun. His appearance is of bones wrapped and skin. A withering plant would seem more alive. I move closer to see if air still fills his lungs. Looking up on his face, I see the man's hollow eyes that show his tattered soul. Little fight is left in this man. Every breath seems a struggle).

With his hands he beckons me to move close, then with a strained voice, he said to me:

“Do not be afraid, for it is not my breath nor my touch which is cursed, but my life-giving fluids that now bring woe to those that come into contact with them.”

(I drew near, for I had been moved with pity and curiosity by the state of this man).

“Take heed, lad, and hold firm to my words, for I now tell you the tale of my ill fate; so that you may not be brought as low as I. a great nation I once had been; Troy was I, and Helen was she; of much beauty Helen was. No sign did I see of the beast that lay within her, for no threat did I see, I foolishly put no barrier between she and I. Open trade we formed and frequently did I enter her city walls. With her I felt much strength; all too late did I remember the wise words, one should not judge a book by cover alone. By then it had been all but too late, for her polluted waters I had already taken in. unbeknownst to me, intruders had entered my gates, invading my land. Now, I know of others whose lands had also been invaded, battle to this day they still do, but successful they are at keeping this enemy at bay. I; I am not so lucky for fear and denial kept me oh so blind. Once this menacing horde of minuscule infectors invaded my land, cunning tactics did they use to completely annihilate all within their path. Those dreadful anarchists skillfully evaded detection by assuming the appearance of those who protect my kingdom. That is how they avoided being recognized, for if they were to be noticed, their merciless plot would have been put to an end. Cloaked, in my city's armor, they sought out my guards to infiltrate my land’s forces. Now strategically positioned, the mischievous invaders assumed command. Manipulating my army so as to attain the material needed to expand their forces. Once their needs were met, they moved rank to rank killing my guards one after another. As their number quickly grew, my army was brought to just a mere few. Chaos and mayhem ensued. Now left...
vulnerable to attack from those who would completely ravish my land, I stood defenseless. As dark clouds moved in, I had been unable to weather the coming storm. After being bombarded and rendered severely crippled, not one wall had been left standing. Battered and broken, I am now but a shell of the nation I once was. That is what brought me to this decrepit state, abandoned and left to rot by family and friends for they do not completely understand this curse. Now make good use of my words, so that no ill fate may befall you, for now you are armed with knowledge, a great weapon and powerful defense. Go tell all that will listen to guard their lands and look for the menace, for some know not that the threat is already within them. Also, tell them so they may understand their ailing brothers and sisters and stay by their side instead of casting them away."

(Where I once saw a feeble man, I now saw strength and great will. That man’s words shall not go in vain, for with those words I will fortify my home and strengthen the foundation of my neighbors’ homes. Even though that man’s battle may be lost, he has passed on his knowledge, and it is through knowledge that this war may yet be won.)
How can territories or borders be distinct when there are no walls or barricades? For humans, this is a very difficult task to take on. We have to see colors that say, this is bloods or this crips. We have to see signs like Brooklyn or Queens to know, okay, now we are in a different borough. What happens when you are in enemy territory? Our human sense only take us so far.

That is why I wish I was a big cat. They can tell or they are told in various ways that this is my territory and you better not cross into it or you'll be in trouble. Cats spray their scents and warn off intruders. See in their world there are no fences or signs, even if there were, cats can't read. What they can see is smell. They smell, through their senses, that this place belongs to another big cat. Invisible border. Cats know when to back down; humans don't. Humans will go and chop forests down, or demolish old buildings, but in the cat world, the only thing that stops an invasion is violence. That's how you lose your territory. One cat cannot fare against two rival cats. In the human world, you have money, you are power. In the cat world you have numbers, you are power.
What do we really see?

I decided to go out to eat after work. So I get to the restaurant only to be told, “Sir, we're sorry, but you can't enter here for dinner. You must have on proper attire.”

I am wearing a shirt, tie, slacks and shoes. I am told that I need a jacket, and no offer is made to provide me with a jacket. As I take in the view of the place, I notice many of the patrons have been dressed as I. Some, because they had removed their jackets, others simply didn't have one.

So I explained that I had a reservation and was having guests join me.

As this was taking place, a couple came in. The man, again, was dressed as I was and wasn't allowed entry. The maître d’ was called to the front. He arrived with a dinner jacket in the man's size. When I inquired as to if there was an available jacket I could use, I was told it wasn't the establishment’s policy to provide jackets to its patrons.

I finally realized that “proper attire is a must,” meant that you must be white to eat there.

Separate lunch counters still exist.
I wish I could forget the scars that have marred my flesh and seared my memory. A fist that knows a nose or a nose that knows a fist.

I wish I could forget the jingle of keys or the slamming of gates or the tears shed in the darkness. That nagging feeling that accompanies me wherever I walk, asking to be owned, told by others to be owned--but would they trade positions with me and do as they say? I can't forget those promises or smiles that are only given out of kindness or pity, that are only meant to be felt in the moment but not perpetually built upon.

But do I want to forget the crumbling of walls or the wailing of pain or the hearts and faces that ceased to exist? Would the total erasure of my experience mar the purity of my soul? That was once a clean slate, to be dirtied by experience, then scrubbed away with Corcraft soap? I don't think I can, I don't think I want to forget because if I forget, I lose a part of me.
A walk in the park

Time flows around me, I can't catch up. I roam the earth for sustenance, I can never find. I bow my head and raise my hands surrendering to whatever gazes down. I smoke cigarettes to ease my ache but it only seems to intensify the pain. My life is wet with tragedy and leaves a trail of midnight wherever I roam. So I walked the streets, it was 3am, I wanted to find a thief. A criminal to pickpocket my soul. I walked the earth it seemed so desolate. I saw a homeless man huddling under a dumpster to hide himself from the rain. I saw two youths covered by a lipstick fog emitting echoes of pleasure. I looked toward the night sky and was greeted with blackness. No pretty twinkling stars No beautiful full-figured moon to seduce agony. I walked searching, looking at closed shops and street lights directing no vehicles.

Hours pass and I found myself in a wooded a area. A place I have never ventured to. The air was different, the sights and the sounds. I felt my numbness slowly dissolving into the air. I looked around and saw aging oak trees and arms of ferns reaching to give me an embrace. I listened to the sound of nocturnal beings whispering a lullaby the orchestration of chirps and croaks began. Gorgeousness in a life that has been so brutal to me. I found a moss covered rock and positioned myself on top of it.
Invisible Shackles

Born again, spit out from the stone face with steel teeth.
No more of that architecture used to confine bodies,
along with the already-caged minds and souls.

That place which exasperated my life’s torment.
Preconditioned to find normalcy in the pain and suffering.

Already less than human,
always nothing and no one of any good or use.
Prepared by my environment, its subtleties emulated that dark place
and told my future.

No amount of preparation made it less painful.
Strength will keep me alive.
A diligent mind allows progression.
But not selling my soul, I remain myself.

Now here,
Now out:
Free.

The dream that allowed me to endure and persevere Has arrived.

Stale icy air fills my lungs.
Deep breath:
So satisfying.

I slowly process the world:
The wind
The birds
The cars.

Focused on everything independently
time seems frozen, then like a flash flood
everything is fluid—the Symphony starts again.

Clinging so tightly to the momentary sense of peace.
Nerves out of control, heart racing,
I cringe from the sound of closing train doors

Reality sets in, the truth revealed:
the only freedom I would ever attain
is the Freedom Within.
Won’t Go Away

This noise seems to never go away.
Why do I notice another in agony?
Why do I see that girl trying to cover her face
with a newspaper, hiding behind it,
with makeup running down her beautiful face?

Why won’t these scenes go away?

I walk in these over-polluted, populated cities
and the aroma I escaped from won’t go away.
The smell has an image of a beautiful
red head that smells of Mary Jane.
This smell is so familiar but foreign
at the same time, why won’t it go away?

Subconscious mess mixed with suppressed
feelings doesn’t make a good mix—like
Henny mixed with hypnotic.
You have this big, green, gigantic, overpowering
potential energy that is scary because
there is no levity, but straight proliferation of feelings.

I hate this place I’m going.
How can I eliminate this place of discomfort
and find a place of happiness?
If it won’t go away, I’ll go away!
Won’t Go Away

No matter what I do, I cannot seem to get rid of you. You are a continuous source of drama.

Even when I swear you off, you always seem to make your way back into my life. Although much of the time I knew you was always there.

I take the energy that I usually devote to you, put it into my workouts, and there you still appear.

Even in my line of work, you find a way to interfere, making your existence known by your presence in every note or line — you’re always on time.

You want control at every turn. I won’t be without you when I’m alone with my children, you’re there hanging out, too.

Certainly you’re in the room any time that a woman is near if she and I have known each other for a while, you find a way to come between us.

You create so much tension between her and me. You even get in the way of some clean fun, between me and women I meet.

Because of you, I am often at war with family, since they cannot understand why I am the way that I am about them.

You just won’t stay away you have to be part of my life. Love, you just won’t go away.

Why won’t you go away?
A Crop of Soul

Like a drop of sweat in the desert, he toils pointlessly away, energy fleeting. Muscles cramped, hands calloused and soul weary, he fears the desolation of winter. Its harsh, bitter winds lashing at his face, while he hunts for food. The unsteady hands at his rifle as he aims—stag, doe, or hare.

Crunch, crunch, crunch, he digs then drops seeds. He buries himself into the dirt. He must feed the beast like the Aztecs have fed their gods. A sacrifice, most ancient, one that can only be rendered in blood and sweat. Pointlessly, he toils away, and thinks, he should leave this land. It’s his land like it was his father’s land before him, and his father’s father before him, but if this land does not produce crops . . .

Like a drop of sweat in the desert, the beast swallows his soul. Muscles cramped, hands calloused, he digs. Life has not been the same since Mary left. That was a time when a drop of sweat saturated his world with love—crops came in plenty then. Mary . . . the soft bounce of her curly blonde hair. The eyes that spoke volumes, but a mouth that seldom whispered a word that did not mean I love you. Ten summers with a heart cold, and eleven winters, blood hot with anger—lonely, without her.

He dug, blood beginning to rise as the temperature cooled, edging towards its snowy destination. Crunch, crunch, repetition, repetition, the tears slowly meandered their way down his cheeks—her smile . . . her scent . . . her warm body. Seeds drop, cover, his soul goes into the dirt.

For forty years his house saw the sun rise from his bed. The flavors of the earth borne from his stove. Cough, cough, spittle laced with blood hits the dirt—he must sacrifice to the gods.
You are sitting in a crowded A train car on your way to see a play that you’ve been long waiting to see. You hear “Watch the closing doors,” so you know the ride is about to begin. You close your eyes to relax and enjoy the ride. You take one deep breath and slowly let it out through your nose.

You feel the smooth vibrations of the train’s wheels through the floor of the car. Your body rocks gently back and forth with the sway of the train as it sails into the darkness of the tunnel, taking you where you want to go. You take another deep breath and let it out slowly again through your nose, allowing yourself total relaxation. You let go of the tension in your toes, then your ankles. You feel as if you no longer have feet. They are so relaxed. Now you work that feeling up your legs, on through to your calves, to your thighs, right through to your waist. Breath again, deep into your chest. You can hear the murmur of the different voices in conversation. It has a melody that is soft and comforting, unlike any symphony you have ever heard. You can see the opening act unfold as the train pulls into the stop you are to get off at.
Solitary Thoughts

Alone in this cell, I gaze
at the stars of my mind, lost in space.
I always felt like a stranger to myself—
a foreigner within my own skin.
Blessed with the gift of nothingness,
I have no set form nor true identity.

A being of pure light that dwells in utter Darkness;
A being arranged with many flaws
And containing the essence of all things,
I reside in this world but feel in no way a part of it.

I am definitely what you see, but not what you perceive.
Apart from the harmonies chaos and entropy,
paradoxically bringing all together to one.
My mind returns from a distant place
as my body hears on the count.
Found

I found him
lost in his thousand yard stare
asking God if his life He could repair
I found him
marching a million miles with a thousand men
praying that the torment of his ancestry would end
I found him
made to stand on a soap box of anger and
bruised ego patiently waiting for hates trigger to unload
I found him
swaddled in freedom's lace
the silk-lined box framing his face
I Am

I am the swiftness of justice for those who are unable to defend themselves.
I am the warmth of the sun touching a lover’s skin.
I am the taste of the changing seasons.
I am a thought waiting to be put into action.
I am a creation created by the creator whose purpose for creating me is unknown.
I am a proud husband, father, and student who continues to strive for greatness.
I am boxes ordered neatly into a schedule.
I am successful because I took control of my own destiny.
I am the light at the end of the tunnel.
I am the peel of a clementine.
I am a former outlaw.
I am books open late at night in lucubration.
I am a drop in the ocean.
I am weary footsteps over snow-covered concrete.
I am that gesture you give to someone who really needs it.
I am sacred earth spoiled by human hands.
I am the smoke expelled from strained lungs.
I am a reminder to myself of my past self and of who I am today.
I am blood on the tracks.
I am a cup filled with a fate stipulated upon a whim.
I am a scarcity in the sense that they don’t make others like me.
I am the power lines that cut across the sky.
I am knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.
afterword

This creative writing workshop, called Lives in Transition, began in October of 2016 and is still growing and changing. The workshop takes place weekly and, first and foremost, provides a space that encourages community and dialogue. Secondly, it encourages and facilitates writing, but does not insist a certain level of productivity or finished work. Everyone writes from their unique perspective and in their own style—without any restrictions regarding form. What emerges from this process includes poetry, poetic prose, short story, personal essay, and stream-of-consciousness narratives. We certainly did a lot of talking, laughing, and eating—but lots of writing happened amongst it all, too.

Most of this writing emerged from 10-15 minute “focused free-writes,” all of which stemmed from prompts we decided on together (though some of the writing was written outside of the workshop, and edited for this book). Prompts centered around ideas of accountability, ghosts/memory, things you cannot get rid of, borders, freedom.

We did several rounds of “I am” poems at different points, which turned out differently each time. Sometimes we employed more literal lines of who we were; sometimes, more figurative. The collaborative “I am” poem featured at the end of this book is a good example of that mix. We created that one by writing on strips of paper, which we placed in the middle of the table and arranged, creating the poem you see here. Surprisingly, there was no repetition of words, exemplifying how differently we all write, but how well it all fits together.

- Hannah Buonaguro, Writing Workshop Facilitator

thank you

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Check out our blog!
Livesintransitionnyc.wordpress.com